

Iowa Quality Standards

**Summary Report to the Iowa Council on Homelessness
FY 15 State Planning Advisory Committee Work**

June 2015

Submitted by State Public Policy Group, Inc. (SPPG)

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OVERVIEW OF FY 2015 SCOPE OF EFFORT

Before providing a summary of the activities and status of the standards development initiative, this section offers an overview of what the State Planning Advisory Committee, with the guidance and facilitation of State Public Policy Group, determined as its scope and products for the year. SPPG provides this summary to provide the Council with a current picture of the deliberative process and the body of work. A separate document provides recommendations from the Committee to the Council for further action.

In the fall of 2014, the Iowa Council on Homelessness (ICH) asked the State Planning Advisory Committee to continue the work to further develop and move toward implementing the standards called for in its 2013 request. All members of the Committee agreed to continue serving with the facilitation and support of State Public Policy Group (SPPG). In day-long monthly meetings, the Committee achieved its goals of reviewing and finalizing the standards and developing a self-appraisal and implementation tool available to any organization wishing to use it.

Since work on this scope began in fall 2014, it has focused on confirmation and minor adjustments of the standards while developing the supportive materials. The Committee worked from its original definition of a standard:

A “standard” is an element of a homelessness program’s operations, services, or performance that is necessary for a quality program and meets funder requirements.

These are fundamental standards necessary for a quality program. Some organizations may exceed many of the standards, and that is to be commended. The same organizations may see that they fall short in some standards, which allows the organization to focus on areas in which improvements can be made.

In the course of its review, the Committee sought input statewide and incorporated suggestions that added value and critical elements to the standards. For example, some of the language seemed to apply only to those organizations receiving public funds, so the language was adjusted to more clearly reflect the intent that standards do apply to all types of organizations and programs, regardless of funding sources. The January 2015 retreat conducted with the Iowa Council on Homelessness provided valuable guidance on tone and content that helped shape the final products.

Several elements were carried throughout the work of the Committee during this second year.

- More deliberate focus was given to the impact of the standards and their implementation on the creation of a statewide system of homelessness services.
- The final standards and tools to help organizations work toward meeting standards require a comprehensive handbook that allows an organization to conduct its self-appraisal and to identify resources to help address areas of focus.
- Interest in the standards and implementation tool for start-up organizations was voiced by stakeholders with increased frequency, leading the Committee to ensure guidance applied to organizations at any stage of development.

In the final standards report and handbook, there are four categories of standards: Governance, Operations, Services, and Performance. The original section on Operations that was part of the 2014 report was separated into two sections, adding the Governance section to call attention to the importance of strong governance in any organization providing services to those experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND TIMELINE

- Contract with SPPG was in effect on October 1, 2014. Work began immediately. State Planning Advisory Committee members from the initial work agreed to continue serving, with the exception of the individual from Iowa Legal Aid. In addition, by the end of the calendar year, a representative from Sioux City joined the group and one from Council Bluffs was included in the communications though she was unable to participate in the work sessions.
- The State Planning Advisory Committee met monthly in day-long work sessions for deliberations and decision making beginning in November. The group met monthly from November through June, typically on the first Tuesday of the month.
- The Committee work was integrated with formal and informal outreach and feedback activities. The first round of outreach was held in December 2014 to introduce and get input on the standards and how organizations anticipate using standards. Specifically, feedback was gathered on what tools would be of greatest benefit to organizations in implementing the standards. Sessions were held in Waverly, North Liberty, Des Moines, Council Bluffs, and Sioux City. A summary report was provided to the Committee and Council on that outreach.
- As an extended session of the regular meeting in January of the Iowa Council on Homelessness, a short retreat was held with Council and Advisory Committee members to discuss key issues and get guidance from the Council on ultimate direction and priorities of the Council. The Committee appreciated this direction and incorporated the ICH guidance into the remaining work.
- Client expectations and perceptions of their experiences receiving services were gathered through focus groups in December and April. Two sessions were completed with adult males and females in shelters in Iowa City and Des Moines. Efforts to convene clients in Waverly were made; client choice, however, meant none chose to attend. Similar challenges were found with bringing together a focus group representing families in Des Moines. Nonetheless, findings from the two focus groups that were completed essentially support the standards. Clients recognize they have personal issues, appreciate the temporary housing, resist rules while understanding the need for them, and want staff to have consistent training so there are not different expectations depending on which staff are working. There is universal appreciation for the case management services and for being held accountable so they can succeed.
- Over the course of the monthly work sessions, the Advisory Committee systematically focused on working through the standards to develop a comprehensive guide for their use. Elements of this work included:
 - Reviewing the standards as a whole and refining them for consistency and reasonableness. Some standards were combined, rearranged, or reworded. The final set includes 44 standards within the four sections.

- Breaking the Operations section into two sections, Governance and Operations, to add clarity for the end user.
 - Developing an explanation for each standard, as needed, that included clarifying the meaning and providing a rationale for including the standard.
 - Identifying a measure for each standard that would demonstrate the organization meets the standard.
 - Researching and providing resources for organizations to guide them in their work to meet each standard. Three types of resources are included: information sources with web links, sample documents with links to those documents, and helpful suggestions from Advisory Committee discussions.
- Two draft documents were completed by mid-May 2015. The Iowa Quality Standards User Handbook includes background information; information about the use of the Handbook; a checklist of standards; and each standard along with explanation, measures, and resources. The Iowa Quality Standards Appendix includes the sample documents that are linked from the resources in the Handbook.
 - Six spring outreach sessions were held between May 27 and June 16 in Sioux City, the Peer-to-Peer Symposium, Dubuque, Iowa City, Des Moines, and Waverly. Participation averaged about 25 people per site. Members of the Advisory Committee led the sessions to explain their work and the relevance of the Iowa Quality Standards to all organizations. Participants had an opportunity to work in small groups to review and discuss the standards in checklist form. After questions and suggestions were addressed the User Handbook was demonstrated. Feedback was very positive with many indicating they will use the standards. SPPG gathered contact information to notify participants statewide once the documents are finalized and live on the Iowa Finance Authority (IFA) website.
 - The Advisory Committee's final meeting was held via conference call on June 8 to finalize the recommendations to the Iowa Council on Homelessness for the next steps to promote and encourage use of the standards.
 - The State Planning Advisory Committee identified 12 recommendations and has included them in a separate report to the Iowa Council on Homelessness. The recommendations cover the areas of ICH decisions and oversight, education and engagement, using and evaluating the standards, and developing the statewide system.

A FINAL NOTE

The State Planning Advisory Committee deserves strong commendation and appreciation for their consistent commitment and investment of their time, resources, and energy into this work. It is not always easy to come together with others you don't know, who work in different types of organizations, and come from different parts of the state. This dozen people stuck with it, respectfully listened to one another, and reached consensus on some very important issues over their 18-months of work together.

We again offer our thanks to the members of the State Planning Advisory Committee:

- Julie Bockenstedt, Iowa City; Iowa Council on Homelessness

- Michelle Brown, Opening Doors, Dubuque
- Jim Cain, Family Promise of Greater Des Moines, Des Moines
- Crissy Canganelli, Shelter House, Iowa City; Policy & Planning Committee Co-Chair, Iowa Council on Homelessness
- Ronelle Clark, YWCA Domestic Violence Sexual Assault Resource Center and Transitional Housing Program, Clinton
- Carrie Dunnwald, Cedar Valley Friends of the Family, Waverly; Iowa Council on Homelessness
- Heather Harney, HACAP, Hiawatha
- Jeannie Kingery, Northern Lights Shelter for Men & Trinity House of Hope Shelter for Women, Mason City
- Susan McGuire, Center for Siouxland, Sioux City
- Nicole Rethman, Domestic/Sexual Assault Outreach Center, Fort Dodge
- Mark Sertterh, Shelter House, Iowa City
- Tony Timm, Central Iowa Shelter & Services, Des Moines; Policy & Planning Committee Co-Chair, Iowa Council on Homelessness

The team at SPPG appreciates the opportunity to work with the Iowa Council on Homelessness and the Advisory Committee to contribute our facilitation to this important work.

- Arlinda McKeen, team lead
- Indira Blazevic Karic
- Natalie Koerber
- Jessie Benson